

THE
PATH TO PERFECTION
A LECTURE

BY
SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA



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THE PATH TO PERFECTION

EVERY bit of our activity presupposes some want and this conscious activity goes by the name of life. Where activity is conscious, that is what we call life ; but when it is unconscious, as in a big engine or machine, we do not regard it as life. Only when activity knows that it is active, it is life. Every activity furthermore is actuated by some want. What has made me active? The desire to get something. Why have you come here? Because you think that you will get knowledge or help of some kind. We never take one step forward without the hope of

getting something, or realizing something. All activity presupposes restlessness and restlessness comes from want. So long as that restlessness is in you, you will have to be active; you will try to satisfy the want in yourself.

But has man really any want? Great God-men like Sri Krishna, incarnations like Buddha and Christ have taught otherwise. Their definition of man is "wonderful." They say that he is birthless, deathless, free from want, all-blissful, self-existent, self-luminous. Even the trident of Shiva has no power to destroy him. He is eternal and indestructible by his very nature. But if that is the definition of man, then what am I? I am also called a man; but I am only three and a half cubits in length, I am born, I die, I have many wants. Can you point out to me a single man from the poorest labourer to the greatest emperor who is not full of wants? Man is, indeed, a creature of wants. The moment the baby comes out

of the womb, it cries. Why? Because it has a want. Man is born in want, he lives in want and in want he dies. Out of want he has come into existence, in want he lives, and from want, he dies.

Then what is the relation of this man to that other man? How can the one be equal to the other? How can the one be united with the other? One is beyond all want, all fear, all birth and death; while the other is a man who is full of all sorts of fears and desires, who is born and who must die. How can there be any relationship between these two men apparently existing at opposite poles? Yet there is a relation. This man who has birth and death, who is finite and limited, this very man points to his infinite nature. Man is always restless, always moving from place to place. Why? Because he is never satisfied, because nothing brings him permanent satisfaction; and this very fact that he is dissatisfied with his finite nature shows that it is not his

natural condition. The fact that he has infinite ambition, that he has insatiable hunger for more and more, proves that he is infinite by nature, and that is why he is always dissatisfied with whatever is finite.

Go to any man and you will find that he is discontented with his finite condition. Not one of you is really content. You may say that you are content with your one hundred rupees a month, but that is laziness. You must never confound laziness with contentment. Nachiketa shows us what true contentment is. Yama offered him wealth, a whole kingdom, beautiful women, but Nachiketa knew that truth alone would satisfy him and he wanted nothing else. But if anyone should offer you two hundred rupees instead of one hundred, would you not take them? That shows that you are not really contented with what you now have. If you will analyse yourself, you will see that there is no end to your ambition. When will that ambition come to an end?

Only when you can say : " I am master of all. The whole universe belongs to me. I want nothing. I have transcended death. I am responsible to none." Until this comes, your ambition will never leave you. You want to get rid of limitation and until you can say that you are limitless, deathless, immortal, you will not be at rest.

This is what is called Mukti or Salvation. So although this little man seems so diametrically opposite to that great man—that infinite man—yet this little man will never rest until he has become one with that infinite man, which shows that that is his real nature. If you take a fish and place it on the peacock throne of Shah Jahan, one of the emperors of India, and bow down and worship it, will it be happy? No, it will rather say: "Throw me even into a cesspool, but do not keep me out of water"; because water is its natural element. In the same way, you are all restless after your lost nature.

There is no man who is not restless, and restless for what? Restless for his lost nature, his infinite nature; and blessed is he who is restless and most miserable is he who is contented, with his present lot. The contented man is no man; he is no more than a brute. You may keep an elephant tied all its life and it will not mind if you give it some food. Men who are thus contented are no better than animals; "Eating, sleeping, procreating and getting frightened we have in common with lower animals"; and if we do not know to do anything higher and better than these, how can we distinguish ourselves from them?

Wherever there is discontent, you must know that there is the germ of greatness. Read the life of any great man, you will find how constantly active and restless he was, always seeking more and more. And those restful people, who have no ambition, they are destined to be coolies. They are just like those bullocks

that turn round and round the mill all day but never leave the groove. When these people were at school they did not care to learn, they were quite content to be at the lower end of the class; but with them there were some who were restless, who were ambitious to learn, and they are the high officers and the men of importance to-day. Study the lives of all great men and you will see that they have become great because they were restless. Therefore do not cease to be active.

Be never satisfied with little. You are infinite, you are all-perfect, and until you realize your infinite nature, you must not stop. Do not think that you are intellectually limited. You have the brain of a Socrates, you have the intelligence of a Newton. Only you have allowed a lot of dust and dirt to cover it over. Wipe away the dust, arouse your ambition, stir up your activity and know that all power is latent in you. You are not limited. No you are as much limitless as any of the

greatest sages of yore between whom and God space and time never intervened.

Our Scriptures teach us that the greatest sin is to call a man a sinner. The moment you think yourself a sinner, weak, you forget your infinite nature and identify yourself with the body and mind. This identifying yourself with the body and mind is the source of all your miseries. If you want to realize your infinite nature throw off all association with your finite nature. Forget your body and mind. Disidentify yourself with your body and mind. You are constantly doing it in fact. Are you always thinking, "I am tall or short, I am dark or fair, I am lean or stout, etc.?" You only think all this when you stand in front of a mirror. What is the definition of health? A man is perfectly healthy when he does not remember that he has a body. Only when you have a headache, do you remember that you have a head, only when you have a pain in the leg, do you

think of your leg. You are spirit itself. You are life itself. Although your body sits upon you with so much power, still it cannot keep you from forgetting it. When you are enjoying a beautiful scene or beautiful music, you forget it; that is, for the time being you have transcended the body. This is your true nature and that is the reason why you are happy. When you are calm, quite, lost in thought, you also do not remember your body and only when something comes suddenly to disturb this state, you call it pain.

In enjoyment thought expires. When you are thinking, when you have no consciousness of your body, where have you gone at that time? You have gone out of your body and mind, and that is enjoyment. Enjoyment is your true nature, therefore you like enjoyment. Man is always restless after happiness, and he is restless because some misery is pinching him. Man is constantly in search of enjoyment: and he is going from this village

to that village, from this town to that town, from this country to that country, only to get his lost enjoyment; and this search after enjoyment is the same as the search after God, for God and bliss are the same. They are synonymous. Therefore it is said, "A fool hath said in his heart there is no God"; for out of God all happiness has come and everyone who seeks happiness, seeks God.

Our definition of God is Anandam (bliss). There is no atheist who does not desire happiness and that happiness is God. Out of bliss has come the whole creation, in bliss it exists and into bliss will it merge. Out of God we and the whole universe have come, in God we rest and to God shall we go. Hence bliss and God are synonymous. So no man can say that he is an atheist, for every man believes in happiness and happiness is God. Every man, indeed, is after happiness, and what happiness do you want? Happiness that knows no break. You

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may take this temporary happiness because it gives you a little pleasure and you want pleasure; but your ideal is happiness that never ends.

Happiness that has no break goes by the name of God. Happiness that has a break goes by the name of sensuality. You may be content for a moment with this limited happiness which gives you momentary enjoyment, but breakless, eternal enjoyment is your ideal and you must realize it. The man who hurries through his meals, rushes to office and works hard the whole day, is really in search of pleasure and believes that he can get it by earning money. And that man who is sitting in a corner, concentrating his mind, trying to forget his environment, trying to find God inside himself, he is doing the same thing.

Now let us examine the two methods. One is really after money, because it will bring food, comforts and pleasures for himself and his family ; so he tries to earn

money and to earn power because he thinks that if he has power he can force nature to bring him whatever he wants. But this method is very precarious. He may get money, but he may not be able to digest the food or enjoy the comforts it brings. I knew a millionaire in Calcutta who was only able to take barley water and thus he was not so well off, even as his lowest servant in point of enjoyment. Then if the man has wealth, how long will he be able to enjoy it? Only so long as the body lasts. We all know that there is nothing so uncertain in this world as life. To the baby in the cradle, to the youth and to the old man, to the rich and the poor, at any moment death may come. And when we identify ourselves with the body, when we believe that by satisfying the body, or by satisfying the mind, we satisfy ourselves, then we can understand how perishable happiness must appear.

Every man will have to undergo six

sorts of transformations. There was a baby in the womb and only because there was a baby in the womb, did a baby come out. When it is born it must have to increase in stature and so undergo all sorts of changes,—it must become a boy, a youth, a man. Then what will follow? A gradual dwindling away. The eyes will lose their power, the ears will cease to hear, the hands and feet will grow less active, the memory will fail. This is the life-history of every living being; and such a being, who is tied to a body and whose mind is all doubts, how can he expect eternal life?

Yet no man wants to die. There is nothing man hates so much as death. But if this be the only life we have, man cannot escape death, so he cannot hope to be happy. But what is the definition of life? Life means *being*—to be. Death means *non-being*—not to be. Now we know that out of being non-being can never come, and being can never become non

being. So life cannot be transformed into death, or death into life. Therefore if man is living, he cannot die. But where can he find that life which cannot be transformed into death? He must have to go beyond the body to find it ; and if he goes beyond the body, he must go beyond the whole universe, for even upon this fragile frame of yours, the whole universe is resting. Upon the eyes the whole form-world is existing ; upon the ears the whole sound-world is existing ; upon the tongue the whole world of taste is existing.

The phenomenon of sleep will prove this very easily. So long as the eyes can see, forms will exist for you ; so long as the nose can smell, odours will exist for you ; so long as the ears can hear, sounds will exist for you ; and so with every sense. Now what is the wakeful condition, when you are in your eyes, your ears and all your senses? Then there is a thoughtful condition when you are in your mind. But there is a condition

when you go away from your senses, when you go away from your mind, and that condition is known as sound sleep. Then a friend may come and sing a sweet tune beside you, but you do not hear him, because you are not in your ears. You are in your body, no doubt, but you are not in your ears or any of your senses. Yet although you are away from your mind and senses, you are still in your body; for if I give you a good push, you wake up. And what does this waking up mean? You come back to your mind, you come back to your senses. While you were asleep, your wife was there by your side, but you did not know it; and so was it with everything about you and with the whole universe. The condition, therefore, on which the whole universe is existent, is that you must be present in your mind and your senses. While you were asleep did any universe exist for you? Did any memory of it exist for you? No. So, although the little body seems so fragile,

and it is no doubt very fragile, yet it is the prop on which the whole universe is resting. To go away from the universe, therefore, it is evident that we must go away from the mind and the senses; and when you do that, you find your eternal life. It was in this way that your forefathers realized their eternal nature. They did it by going away from their external senses and from their inner sense, the mind. And if you can do this, at once you will realize your eternal life. Then absolute bliss will be yours. This is salvation.

Thus you find that one method leads you astray and the other takes you to the goal. The method you are all following, earning money, etc., is a false method, for you are worshipping this body of yours. It is the only God you worship. Because you worship this God, you love your wife, because you worship this God, you love good dishes, beautiful scenery, sweet sounds, etc. But when you serve a master

you expect some wages. Yet when you work for this God, your body, what does it give you? It leads you to the thing that you hate most,—death. You have been serving this master for so many lives and each time he has rewarded you with death. Therefore this cannot be a true service. If you want to give true service, which will bring you a true reward, serve the real God. Then you will get eternal life.

The path of service is inwards and not outwards. The path which leads you to realize life eternal is not by the exercise of your out-going energies, but of your in-going energies. You must collect your energies and direct them inwards. Unless you do this, you are no better than the lower animals. The real life is inside yourself, not outside. But you must work hard to find it. You have been worshipping this God of your body for so many lives, it is not easy to begin to worship the true God all at once. It is easier to

conquer the whole world than one's own mind. Hence even so great a warrior as Arjuna had to admit that although he had conquered so many kingdoms, he was unable to master his own mind. Why? Arjuna was a hero, there was no doubt of it; but because he had never worked in this field, therefore he felt himself powerless. And we are like Arjuna. But to realize your eternal nature in this life, you must take this path. "There is no other path leading to salvation."

So you see that the path has been found which will make you the happiest of men, the wealthiest of men and the most powerful of men. Now what is necessary? The will. Unless you have the will to follow it, it is useless to know the path. You may know how to cook all kinds of the best dishes, but unless you go to the kitchen and actually make some of these dishes, your knowledge is of little use to you. So mere knowledge that

the path is inside will not help you. You must work hard and go there. Religion is therefore a thing that is absolutely practical. It has nothing to do with disputing and theorizing. That may come before you have the will to follow the path. But you may be the most ignorant man, still if you have an intense desire to go to God, you can go inside and reach Him without any learning whatever. Then even the most learned will come and sit at your feet. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was almost illiterate. He scarcely knew how to read and write, yet the greatest pandits used to go to him to have their doubts cleared. How was it that he was able to do this? Because he had the intense will to realize God and he realized Him. His life is a standing protest against the view that a man can only know by reading books or by passing examinations. This is a very meagre idea of knowledge. After your life-long struggle you really know nothing. Socrates.

was the wisest of men, because he knew that he knew nothing.

Such a man not only sees God himself but he can make others see Him. Swami Vivekananda in his boyhood was constantly in search after a man who could say that he had seen God, otherwise, he said, how can I know that He exists? Whenever he heard of a great Sadhu or a great teacher, he would go and ask, "Does God exist?" The man would answer, "Yes." Then he would put the question, "Have you seen Him?" When ~~they would answer~~ in the negative, he would turn and go away. Nowhere could he find a man who said that he had seen God, and for that reason he had come to the conclusion that God was a matter of imagination. Then one day he came to this prophet of Dakshineswar, to this illiterate sage, and he asked him, "Have you seen God?" At once Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes." "Can you make me see Him?" "I can", was the Bhagavan's im-

mediate answer. At last Swamiji was satisfied; and this is the reason why in all his books he insists over and over again that religion consists in realization. Religion is indeed altogether a matter of realization.

You must see God. But to do it, you will have to work hard. First you will have to overcome the old habits, these habits which have come by worshipping the false God through so many lives. You must conquer the mind and the senses. Unless, like Christ, you crucify this body and these senses, ~~you cannot hope to rise~~ you will not be able to raise yourself from this dead body. If you would raise yourself, you must crucify the body and conquer the senses. This everyone must do. And the best means Sri Ramakrishna gives. He says, if you would conquer your senses, you must regard God as the highest. If you are a lover of beauty, where can you find such beauty as in God? If you are a lover of eloquence

who can be more eloquent than God, from whom all the Vedas have come into existence? If you are a lover of power, what being can be more powerful than God? Everyman loves one of these, and all of these are to be found in infinite degree in God. If you love a beautiful woman, her beauty will only last for a short time, but God's beauty is perennial. So if you want perennial beauty, indestructible life, all power and all knowledge, you must go to God. But to go to God, you do not need any money, you do not have to buy a ticket. To go to Him, you do not need your legs; to see Him you do not need your eyes; to hear Him you do not need your ears. He is inside you; and to reach Him, you have to shut up all these. To see Him you must shut your eyes, to hear Him you must close your ears, to go to Him you must give up all outer activity.

So take the hint and go inside and realize Him. Then only will you be a

true man. But to do this you must have intense will. If once, however, you recognize your real relation to Him, that He is your real father and real mother, your real friend and companion, and do go to Him, you will be infinitely rewarded, for He will make Himself even your servant in order to care and provide for you; so if you are not mad, you can choose only Him, since from Him alone can you get the highest bliss and the highest wisdom.

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